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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the types of gender bias stereotyping that has been prevalent in children's books and its impact on children. Results are presented of a gender role model analysis that used the International Reading Association's Children's Choices book list, and recommendations are given to help correct and balance gender stereotypes when using children's books. Traditionally, females were presented in literature roles that were less exciting, involved less problem solving, and were less involved in life than the roles for males; females were seldom main characters. In this study, 45 children's books were coded to determine the difference in gender role models for females and males in children's books. It was found that 36 percent of the main characters were female, 47 percent were male; in secondary characters, 47 percent were female, and 41 percent, male. Several emerging trends were noted in more recent literature, specifically, the emergence of female adventurers and rescuers and of males who helped with the household chores and child care. Collaboration and cooperation were found to be stressed over gender specific tasks. Books are suggested as a vital way to encourage children to think about expanding their concepts of behaviors and possibilities. Special ideas and texts to be used are suggested, such as rewriting a story with changed gender grammar or discussing word usage and story slant. It is suggested that books can help to balance gender roles so that the characters the children read about and identify with, are suitable models to help them prepare for the realities of the future. (Contains 27 references.) (NAV)

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WEAVING GIRLS INTO THE CURRICULUM

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WEAVING GIRLS INTO THE CURRICULUM

Books and stories have long been a method used to teach children what is acceptable and expected in their culture. When the books used present a bias picture, the children using them do not develop a variety of possibilities for their life. The role models in many children's books continue to perpetuate stereotypes of behavior and actions that do not match the reality of today's world. This is especially true for girls who, through gender bias face "loss of self esteem, decline in achievement, and elimination of career options" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 1).

Realizing that female gender bias is an issue that impacts 51 percent of the population is the first step in awareness to change. Willingness to make changes in personal behaviors and teaching approaches is the second step and that step will benefit 100 percent of the population.

This presentation addresses the types of gender bias stereotyping that has been prevalent in children's books and the impact it has on all children. The results of a gender role model study done by the author using the International Reading Association's Children's Choices is reviewed and recommendations to help correct and balance gender stereotypes when using children's books are presented.

BACKGROUND

Howard Gardner (1991) writes that schemata young children develop to explain their world will stay with them throughout their lives unless they receive information to change views and attitudes. Children use the behaviors or gender expectations that are modeled and practiced in their surroundings. The modeling comes from families, other people, TV, movies, and books. To grow into well rounded adults who are able to utilize all of their potential, children need exposure to a myriad of possibilities from a wide variety of models that give many different visions of opportunities and ways of behaving.

"Stories have formed us all" (Heilbrum, 1988, p. 37). Historically, stories have been told to children to shape and influence them. Stories have been used for centuries to provide children with role models, to perpetuate societies' fundamental values and practices as well as acceptable behaviors. Books give implicit messages to children about their world. The characters in the books are the symbolic models with which children identify (Bettelheim, 1962; Brooke-Gunn & Mathews, 1979; Plato, 1956). Book characters affect children's attitudes and behaviors, teach them acceptable or unacceptable actions, and provide models to be emulated (Bergquist, 1985; Kinman, 1985). These models influence children's gender actions, moral behaviors, and beliefs about their abilities (Peterson & Lach, 1990; Shannon, 1986; Tetenbaum & Pearson, 1989)

Shannon (1986) said:

> The books children read and those read to them contribute to their intellectual, emotional, and social development. Moreover, these books provide examples that confirm and challenge the decisions of children's daily lives. The effect of these books is rarely immediate; rather it is the result of repeated exposure over long periods of time (p. 656).

When children read books, the scenarios become a part of their real world. The characters, ideas, and feelings interweave with real world ideas and feelings. Piagetian terms tell us that children learn by assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the integration of new information into already existing concepts. Accommodation enables children to use new information for the modification of their concepts. Children engage in these two processes to learn roles through books. "Reading is . . . a way to broaden children's conceptual backgrounds, especially at the primary level, by introducing them to a variety of things, people, and places of which they might otherwise be unaware" (Hamlin, 1982, p. 62).

A number of major studies in the past have looked at the portrayal of females in children's books. Traditionally the females were shown in roles that were less exciting, less problem solving, less involved in life than the roles for males. Females were not seen as main characters, used in titles, shown in illustrations, or given roles with action as frequently as males. All the language used masculine markers. Females were shown few occupational roles other than mother. They were only allowed to achieve vicariously through males and were dependent on males for

advice, decisions, and leadership. Females roles were only those of passivity, fearfulness, nurturing, and deference to males. All of these items tended to encourage females to believe they were second class as compared to males. The male's roles were those of independence, aggression, fearlessness, leadership, problem solving, and stoicism. The difference between the sexes in children's books was extensive (Blumen-Lipman, 1984; Saario, Jacklin, Title, 1973; Weitzman, Eifler, Hakade, & Ross, 1972). Improvement in the gender roles found in the books has begun; however, "while more females are included, representation is far from equal, and starkly drawn stereotypes remain: competitive, creative, and active boys; dependent, submissive, and passive girls" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p.260).

Children's books alone cannot change attitudes and models, but they do play an important part. Greenberg (1978) stated that "anything that limits children's interests, abilities, and knowledge is hardly the way to prepare . . . for an eighty year lifespan" (p. 234). The lack of positive, supporting role models in children's books has been one avenue that has contributed to the undermining of self-esteem for women causing them to limit their intellectual horizons and stunt their future job potential.

The impact on young girl's self-esteem, career aspirations, academic interests, educational experiences, and career goals was identified through a major study done by the American Association of University Women (AAUW, 1990). AAUW found that little attention was being "given to the inequities in our classrooms that

inhibit girls from reaching their potential for achievement" (p. 1). Girls are not receiving "the education, support, or challenges they need to become part of the highly skilled work force . . . to reach their full potential" (p. 6). The AAUW study does not show change from past studies; gender stereotyping has remained stable. Johnson (1990) wrote that "in spite of the prevalent fantasy that we are now in a postmodern feminist era where equal rights are unquestioned, the stereotypes about women and men remain essentially the same" (p. 43).

In their 1946 study of basal readers, Child, Potter, and Levine concluded that girls "who . . . have to make their own living are failing, if they identify with female characters, to receive the same training in the development of motives for work and achievement that boys are receiving" (p. 48). Females, in picture books, have been portrayed in home-related roles doing dull and uninteresting things while the males did a variety of exciting activities. Because of the limiting roles in which female characters were shown, most girls grew up with a narrow view of themselves and their opportunities. Many females felt the only role for them was as a mother. When books present only traditional roles for males and females, children develop very confining views of the world and of their options. When girls are exposed to egalitarian materials they are more likely to broaden their horizons (Simpson, 1978).

The 1990 U.S. Census reported that 58 percent of all females were working. In the 1940 census, only 29 percent of the females

were in the labor force. Today, as in the past, the majority of the working women are employed as technicians and support workers in service jobs such as teaching, nursing, clerical work, or in retail trade (Ries & Stone, 1992) where they earn 85 cents to 95 cents per man's earned dollar (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1995).

STUDY OF CURRENT CHILDREN'S BOOKS

This author coded 45 books from the International Reading Association's 1992 Children's Choices book list. The coding used was developed by Saario, Jacklin, and Tittle (1973) to determine the difference in gender role models for females and males in children's books. A total of 36 percent of the main characters were female, 47 percent were male, and 17 percent were undifferentiated or androgynous characters. The secondary characters were 47 percent female, 41 percent male, and 11 percent undifferentiated. The total percentage of female characters, main or secondary, in the books was 46 percent. The total percentage of males was 43 percent; the rest were undifferentiated. There were characters in the illustrations which were not part of the story and coding identified 36 percent of these characters as adult males. Males were still the more dominant characters in children's books. The behaviors of the characters that showed significant differences at the $<.05$ level using a chi square distributions were problem solving behaviors used more by the males and conformity used more by the females.

Findings of significant similarities between this study and past studies were an increase in the number and variety of different roles shown for females. Females appeared in titles. Male characters still received more positive consequences for their actions and females still bestowed more negative consequences on themselves and received more neutral consequences from others for their actions. Females still have a narrower variety of occupational role models.

The study identified several emerging trends in children's literature. Females now have some adventures, although the male adventures were more involved and exciting. Females some times rescue others rather than always being rescued. Females were shown outdoors and dressed ready for action rather than for watching. Males were shown helping with household chores and frequently did the child care. Males were not as aggressive or physically exertive as they have been shown in the past; they were more nurturing, social, and constructive. There were significantly more child centered stories than adult centered stories and more of the stories were written in third person gender rather than masculine gender.

Newer leadership literature has begun to stress a model of cooperation and collaboration for achieving results. It was the undifferentiated characters in these books who modeled this form of interaction. Relationships have long been a strong factor in how females achieve goals, but they were not acknowledged for this type of behavior in the books.

The books in the 1992 Children's Choices show an improvement in the female models, but equality has not yet been reached. This will happen when both sexes display equal amounts of all types of behaviors, activities, and jobs.

WAYS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE

Books have been one of the ways to help all children achieve change. A dearth of strong models for females has been absent in children's books both in the past and the present. Because of that void, girls lack a blueprint for developing themselves fully, but for males there are few characters that are able to show their vulnerability and softer feelings (Hancock, 1989). This results in both genders being cheated out of possibilities.

"When children read about people in nontraditional gender roles, they are less likely to limit themselves to stereotypes" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 69). When models change, behavior changes. All children need nonsexist reading material during the years when they are establishing a sense of identity and social order (Kinman & Henderson, 1985). To help children grow into the roles that will be required for the world today, it is vital to expose them to reading material that contains non-stereotypical models for both genders. Girls especially need messages that tell them they are competent and capable of fulfilling their potential (AAUW, 1990).

Adults are responsible for finding and using books that provide both girls and boys with equal opportunities; books with

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contemporary and positive role models that illustrate respect for both genders. The books used should give children examples of females and males doing comparable tasks and having their achievements judged similarly. A good criteria is "characters should be individuals consistent with their own personalities and the context of their situations" (Rudman, 1995, p. 181).

The aim is to encourage children to think about expanding their concepts of behaviors and possibilities. The following recommendations are ways to combine books and activities to encourage children to rethink notions of gender. By weaving these types of activities into and through the everyday curriculum, children will receive a more balanced presentation of gender equity to emulate.

IDEAS AND CHILDREN'S BOOKS TO HELP EXPAND GENDER ROLES

* Discuss the concept of stereotypes; how are they learned and what are their positive and negative values. Use books such as Matthew's Dream and My Great Aunt Arizona to compare and contrast the female's attitudes; the roles are reversed.
* Examine children's personal experiences and how those lead them to think differently about stereotypes. Mirette On The High Wire ia a good book to use; it shows a female leading.
* Examine "women's work" and "men's work". How do books show women and men at work? Have the class do a survey to see if the books are consistent with what they experience daily.

Take Time To Relax and The Dog Who Had Kittens have non-stereotypical roles for both genders.

* Keep logs or journals to observe gender stereotypes in every day life, in books, on TV, in movies, and cartoons. There are books written in journal form to model. Only Opal and Catherine Called Birdy are current books using this format.
* Role play scenarios that counteract stereotypes. Amazing Grace depicts this well.
* Discuss word usage in stories and how a word can slant the reader's view of a character; examples: spinster, the little woman, poet-poetess, doll, , fishwife, jock, hunk, macho. Henry's Wild Morning puts the negative examples in italics.
* What are the words most often used to describe women, men, or children in books? The book King of the Playground describes two contrasting ways for males to react in the same situation.
* What words tell how different characters act in the story? The transformation story of CinderEdna from Cinderella shows a nice contrast in actions.
* Are the females in the story depicted differently from the males? Is the depiction realistic? Two books by Simon James, My Friend Whale and Dear Mr. Blueberry have completely different characterizations of females and males actions in similar situations.
* How are jobs divided in the children's homes? in the books? Take Time To Relax shows the same jobs divided differently depending on the day and the outside activities of the family.

* Discuss how realistic are the family situations in the stories.
* Rewrite the story by changing gender grammar. Books such as Paper Bag Princess have done this with traditional tales.
* Read some books by changing the names and pronouns to the feminine gender to show girls in action and adventure roles. June 29, 1999 is a book that gives a girl the lead role.
* Encourage children to push the boundaries of stereotypical confines. I Want To Be Me is a beautiful book that gives a plethora of ideas for living a full, inquiring life.

CLOSING

Change goes in waves. Supporters of change work hard for gains, but public enthusiasm declines as time goes on. Younger women who have received the benefits of changes in the status of women do not see the need to continue pressure because their life has known the new, not the old. They become apathetic and do not work for continued gains. This allows the segment of the public opposed to gender system changes to strengthen their positions and to gain ground in halting or reversing hard won changes (Chafetz, 1990).

Books alone cannot change children's attitudes; however, they can help children expand their views of themselves and their world. They can help to open new horizons and point the way to a wider variety of possibilities for behaviors and career options for both females and males. It is important for all children to

be exposed to books with a balance of gender roles so characters they identify with, the ones they lose themselves in, are suitable models to help them prepare for the realities of the future world.

FURTHER BOOK SUGGESTIONS

A very short list of books published since 1990 that contain good, unstereotypical models for all children.

Ashby, R., & Ohrn, D.G. (Ed). (1995). Herstory: Women who changed the world. New York: Viking.

Carlson, N. (1991). Time to relax. New York: Viking.

Celsi, T. (1990). The fourth little pig. Austin, TX: Steck-Vaughn.

Creech, S. (1995). Walk two moons. New York: Scholastic.

Cushman, K. (1994) Catherine called Birdy. New York: Harper Trophy.

Cushman, K. (1995). The midwife's apprentice. New York: Clarion.

Freedman, R. (1993). Eleanor Roosevelt: A life of discovery. New York: Clarion.

George, J.C. (1994). Julie. New York: Harper Collins.

Hamilton, V. (1995). Her stories. New York: Blue Sky Press

Hoffman, (* ^]1). Amazing Grace. New York: Dial.

Houston, G. (1992). My great-aunt Arizona. New York: Dial.

Jackson, E. (1994). CinderEdna. New York: Lothrop, Lee, & Shepard.

Kellogg, S. (1995). Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett. New York: Morrow.

Macdonald, M. (1991). Rosie's baby tooth. New York: Atheneum.

McCully, E.A. (1992). Mirette on the high wire. New York: Putnam & Sons.

Martinez, A.C. (1991). The woman who outshone the sun. New York: Scholastic.

Moss, T. (1993). I want to be. New York: Dial.

Naylor, P.R. (1991). King of the playground. New York: Atheneum.

Priceman, M. (1994). How to make an apple pie and see the world. New York: Knopf.

Ringgold, F. (1992). Aunt Harriet's railroad in the sky. New York: Crown.

Ringgold, F. (1991). Tar beach. New York: Crown.

Robertus, P.M. (1991). The dog who had kittens. New York: Holiday House.

Whiteley, O. (1994). Only Opal. New York: Philomel.

Wiesner, D. (1992). June 29, 1999. New York: Clarion.

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Brooks-Gunn, J. & Matthews, W.S. (1979). He and she: How children develop their sex-role identify. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Blumen-Lipman, J. (1984). Gender roles and power. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Chafetz, J.S. (1990). Gender equity: An integrated theory of stability and change. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Child, I.L., Potter, E. H., & Levine, E.M. (1946). Children's textbooks and personality development: An exploration in the social psychology of education. Psychogical Monographs, 60,(3), 1-31.

Gardner, H.(1991).The unschooled mind. New York: Harper Collins.

Greaves, M. (1992). Henry's wild morning. New York: Dial.

Greenburg, S. (1978). Right from the start: A guide to nonsexist child rearing. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Hancock, E. (1989). The girl within. New York: Fawcett.

Kinman, J. R., & Henderson, D. L. (1985). An analysis of sexism in Newbery Medal award books from 1977-1984. The Reading Teacher, 38(9), 885-889.

Lionni, L. (1992). Matthew's dream. New York: Knopf.

Peterson, S.B., & Lach, M.A. (1990). Gender stereotypes in children's books: Their prevalence and influence on cogni tive and affective development. Gender and Education, 2(2), 185-197.

Purcell, p. & Stewart, L. (1990). Dick and Jane in 1989. Sex Roles, 22(3/4), 177-185.

Ries, P. & Stone, A. J. (Ed.). (1992). The American women 1992-1993: A status report. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Rouse, W.H.D. (1956). Great dialogues of Plato. New York: Mentor Book.

Rudman, M.K. (1995). Children's literature: An issues approach. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Saario, T. N., Jacklin, C. N., & Tittle, C. K. (1973). Sex role stereotyping in the public schools. Harvard Educational Review, 43(3). 386-416.

Sadker, M. & D. (1994). Failing at fairness: How our schools cheat girls. New York: Touchstone Press.

Shannon, P. (1986). Hidden within the pages: A study of social perspective in the young children's favorite books. Reading Teacher, 39(7), 656-663.

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